



SCIENCE FICTION

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COVER: Space-sickness strikes our hero; as suggested
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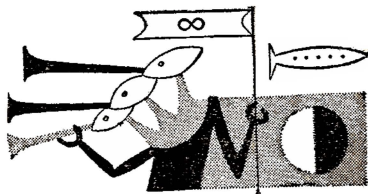
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Fanfare



BREAKING POINT

by ARTHUR H. RAPP

Whenever something of suitable quality can be found, INFINITY will reprint an item from a "fanzine"—one of the amateur journals published as a hobby by the more enthusiastic devotees of science fiction. "Breaking Point" originally appeared in UNIVERSE, which was edited and published by Ray Nelson.

I DO not like you, General Henkle.

I do not like the arrogant way you bark orders at your cringing subordinates; I do not like the faultless perfection of your well-tailored uniform with its breastful of ribbons and neat pentagons of stars. The uniform should be ill-fitting, torn and bloodstained, General Henkle—then you would look like a soldier.

I do not like your wonderful invention for the defense of our country, General Henkle. I do

not like these tiny artificial satellites endlessly circling, circling, in the blue-black stratosphere above the blue-green earth. I do not think any of those people down there like the feeling that, day or night, wherever they may go, they are never out of range of your atomic cannon, General Henkle, your Damoclean swords dangling on the tenuous filament of international diplomacy.

I do not like the lines I see in the faces of those who spend a week riding one of your satellites, alone, alone with the controls of death and desolation, knowing that when you give the word, General Henkle, theirs must be the hand which looses the deadly fission-blast upon their fellow men. I do not like the thought of the neuroses which those satellite-passengers develop, General Henkle—fear of space, fear of atomic power, fear of height, fear dredged from deep in the subconscious

and eating like an unquenchable atomic fire at the bright surface of a sensitive mind.

You need sensitive minds in these death-globes you launched, don't you, General Henkle? You could find plenty of soldiers with insensitive minds, plodders who could withstand the solitude of space, couldn't you? But no, you must have more than a robot-mentality, mustn't you? You must be able to trust that your switch-throwers will never forget, never make a mistake, accidentally release the ravaging destruction upon "our fair and noble nation," rather than upon "those rapacious foreign aggressors, tensed to strike."

That problem worries you, doesn't it, General Henkle, Commander-in-Chief Henkle, Would-be Dictator Henkle? You want to know how much you can strain a sensitive mind, a fine steel sword, before it snaps under the stress, don't you? You *need* to know that, don't you? Until you know that, you cannot risk precipitating the actual crisis which will throw your war machine into action, to let you strike first—"in defense"—you cannot do that without knowing the measure of a mind, can you?

So, General Henkle, worried and impatient Henkle, you have taken men like me—inoffensive,

peace-loving citizens—and by means of your power and your intimidation, have "persuaded" us to ride in your tiny metal moons. You want to know if we can stand a week alone, alone in space with the steady-burning stars and the corona-haløed sun. And, in fact, we were honored to accept the task, weren't we, General Henkle? After all, it would mean rewards for us later, when you became ruler of the world, wouldn't it? And we were serving our country, weren't we?

That was long and long ago, General Henkle. That was six days ago. In six twenty-four-hour periods a man can do a lot of thinking, General Henkle. A man can think many thoughts in one hundred and forty-four hours, General Henkle — in 8,640 minutes. A man can think a thought a second, General Henkle, and a man can think of almost everything in 518,400 seconds of solitude, hurtling above the green fields and blue waters and misty clouds of Earth. A man can think of history, General Henkle, of how the progress of the ages has been interlined with bloodshed and ever more bloodshed. A man can watch the tiny specks appearing and disappearing as the Earth rolls beneath him, and know those specks are cities, metropoli filled with men and

women and children who would not appreciate dying in your "glorious war," General Henkle.

A man can watch your own capital city roll into view, as he has watched the capitals of Russia and America and Belgium and Brazil, and reflect that, from here, they all look the same. A man can watch the parade of cities beneath the blunt, ugly muzzle of the atomic cannon which protrudes through the plastiglass, and realize that it is as simple to flip that red switch when *you* are beneath the cannon, as when the Russians, or Americans, or Belgians or Brazilians are under the sights.

A man's fingers can twitch with the intensity of his thoughts, Murderer Henkle—a man can think of the minds your mad scheme has already shattered, and your war not even begun. A man can think of all you plan to do, and wonder if such a militarist should not be exterminated. A man can brush his fingers against the red toggle switch, gently, caressingly, feeling its cool plastic under the skin of his fingers, feeling a slight burr at one edge, where the two molded halves are joined.

Murderer Henkle! Killer!

Madman! You cannot control the destiny of the world! You are not the Supreme Power on Earth! The Supreme Power is sitting at this control panel, hand on the red toggle switch which can blast you into atomic ruin.

Mad Dog Henkle! Die! Die like the beast you are! *So!*

FILE: XP2137-21/3-a24 TO:
Commander-in-Chief FROM:
Psych

SUBJECT: Atomic Satellites, Selection of Personnel.

1. Experimental Project 2137 has been carried out as planned.

2. Results show that personnel normally succumb to acute schizoid paranoia after five days in the Satellites, and close the "firing switch" about twelve hours after first symptoms appear.

3. In view of Par. 2 above, it is recommended that tours of duty in the Satellites be 48-hour periods, beginning as soon as the simulated cannon are replaced with the real armament. This should leave an ample safety factor so far as mental stability of personnel is concerned.

—E. J. WOOTEN, Colonel,
Med. Corps., Chief Psychologist.

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